

WANTON-HUNTER HOUSE  
54 Washington Street  
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

HABS NO. RI-7

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
11-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Rhode Island

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Philip D. Creer, District Officer  
14 College Street, Providence, R.I.

HABS

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON

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ADDRESS ONLY  
THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

February 24, 1942.

Dr. Leicester B. Holland,  
Chief, Division of Fine Arts,  
Library of Congress,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dr. Holland:

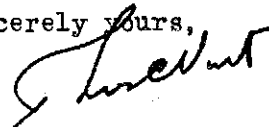
The enclosed index card RI-78, Capt. Dennie House, No. 59 Washington Street, Newport, Rhode Island, now Parish House of St. John's Church is an addition to the Rhode Island priorities. A letter from the District Officer regarding HABS projects in Rhode Island contains information that will involve a few corrections in surveys and index cards previously transmitted as follows:

Nichols-Wanton-Hunter House, No. 54 Washington Street, Newport, is the correct designation and address of this survey. Seven additional photos will be sent to the Library shortly. Index card and data sheet should read "The original exterior doorway was removed and at present is on the Parish House (Dennis House) St. John's Church, No. 59 Washington Street (corner of Poplar), Newport, Rhode Island." The Nichols-Wanton-Hunter House now (1941) is the Convent of our Sisters of St. Joseph. The photo of the original exterior doorway in the data book should be corrected to read "This picture shows the Nichols-Wanton-Hunter House Doorway on the Parish House, Corner of Washington and Poplar Streets. Only the pediment is original, the lower part of the doorway made by a Mr. James N. Gibson, Builder, in 1926. Mr. Charles F. McKim, of McKim, Meade and White saw the doorway on the ground and rescued it.

A cross reference should be made for the Dennis House indicating the doorway was originally on the Nichols-Wanton-Hunter House and was installed in 1926.

This will affect sheets No. 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 of the drawings of Survey RI-7, and photo 7-2, Doorway, in the data book.

Sincerely yours,



Thos. C. Vint,  
Chief of Planning.

Enclosure 2367418

WANTON-HUNTER HOUSE  
54 Washington Street  
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Owner: Corporation of St. Joseph's Church.

Date of Erection: About 1746

Builder: James Sheffield

Architect: Peter Harrison

Present Condition: Very good

Number of Stories: 2½, frame building

Materials of Construction: Foundations are of stone. Manogany panelling (interior), teakwood and manogany staircase. Priceless paned glass windows discarded. Some quaint Scriptural tiles around fireplace opening still intact.

Other Existing Records: "The Wanton Hunter House" by Agnes C. Storer.

Article in NEWPORT DAILY NEWS, May 27, 1916, page 8 on "Secret Staircase".

George C. Mason, "Newport Reminiscences."

Rhode Island Historical Society.

"Early Homes of Rhode Island"-Downing, Pages 146 & 155, Drawing P. 156.

Additional Data: Letter from James N. Gibson, Builder, 60 Prairie Ave. Newport, January, 1926, to Mr. Undike, Merrymount Press. (Now on file, Society for Preservation of New England Antiquities) quote: "Doorway originally on the Hunter, or

R.I.  
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De Ternay House, now St. Joseph's Convent, was on the water side, and was removed and thrown away to make room for a porch. Mr. McKim saw the pediment on the ground, obtained it, and simply nailed it over a recessed on the north side of Washington and Poplar, where it has been for forty years. Some three years ago, the property was occupied by Father Hamlin. A year and a half ago, I drew the head and worked out the lower part as well as I could from information at hand. Repaired pediment, set in place and built new work under it. Pediment, all carving and cornice down to top of pilaster caps is original--also curved portion of architrave. All else is new, door and frame, pilasters and window over. The dormers are in the Colonial style of twenty years ago."

Agnes C. Storer, author of "The Wanton Hunter House" wrote: "The saddest vandalism of all, however, was the removal of the great front door". Quoting from George C. Mason, Newport Reminiscences- "surmounted by a pediment with terminal volutes enriched in turn by carved bunches of grapes and leaves while from a demi-pedestal there arose in the center a large and boldly cut pineapple."

Transcript from records  
City Hall, Newport, R.I.

October 23, 1874


Deed Old Colony Steamboat Co. to  
John T. Gray et Samuel Oakley  
Vanderpool of New York City.

December 27, 1881

Deed from John T. Gray et Samuel  
Oakley Vanderpool to Horatio R.  
Storer.

December 24, 1917

Deed from Horatio R. Storer to  
Corporation of St. Joseph's Church  
(Given).

  
Philip P. Greer  
District Officer for  
Rhode Island C. 1937

(114) 10/23/40

## THE WANTON HUNTER HOUSE

HABS  
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11-

This justly celebrated Colonial Mansion is one of the oldest, if not the oldest house now standing on Washington Street. From the historical researches made thus far it appears to have been built prior to 1730, though owing to the water-soaked condition of the old records the exact date has not been as yet definitely determined. Here gracious hospitality was dispensed for years by its original owner, Deputy Governor Jonathan Nichols, Jr., son of Deputy Governor Jonathan Nichols, both these public-spirited gentlemen taking an active part in the affairs of the Colony. Both died in office.

After the death of Deputy Governor Jonathan Nichols, Jr., the house became the property of Colonel Joseph Wanton, Jr., who also filled the office of Deputy Governor, and who lived here for a number of years. He was a Royalist, and during the Revolution found more congenial residence in New York, where he died on August 7, 1780.

Soon after the death of Deputy Governor Wanton, the house became the property of the Hon. William Hunter, U.S. Senator and Minister to Brazil, its long established tradition for generous and far reaching hospitality being still further enhanced while in the possession of the Hunter family. Subsequently sad changes came upon the old mansion, through the installation of modern heating and modern lighting, immediately before my father, the late Dr. Horatio Robinson Storer, became its owner, and, at this time, many of the most beautiful features were ruthlessly thrown out,--including the small paned glass windows which now would have been priceless, and many, though not all, of the quaint Scriptural tiles, the majority of which still enrich a number of the fireplaces, the most interesting of these being a particularly fine double row of tiles still existing in the de Ternay room, (Northeast room).

The most interesting and unique architectural features of the Wanton-Hunter House today,--incidentally it should be noted, the entire interior is built of San Domingo mahogany,--are undoubtedly the superb mahogany paneling of the two lower stories, the beautiful proportion of its rooms and large halls, and the wonderful teak and mahogany staircase leading to the third story which is unusual, as, generally, these elaborate stairways only extend up two stories. Every rung of its balusters is hand-carved in three distinct patterns. It is thought highly probably that this staircase is the work of Peter Harrison, as the balusters resemble other work of the kind known to have been by him. The famous northeast room contains some of the most beautiful paneling in New England, the delicately moulded columns ending in acanthus tipped Corinthian capitals, while its lovely shell-topped cabinets with their toddy shelves are also noteworthy. Apropos of these famous cabinets Thomas Wentworth Higginson says in "Malbone an Old Port Romance", there are too most graceful shell patterns which one often sees on old furniture but rarely in houses."

AGNES C. STORER.